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UP CLOSE

DELIVERING EXCELLENCE IN HOTEL FRANCHISE EXPERIENCE

VILAS PAWAR, CEO – FRANCHISE BUSINESS, LEADS LEMON TREE HOTELS IN STRATEGIC FRANCHISE GROWTH, EMPHASISING QUALITY SERVICE AND A COMMITMENT TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AMIDST INDUSTRY CHALLENGES

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BY SAURABH TANKHA

For over three decades-and-a-half, Vilas Pawar worked with prestigious brands like Taj Hotels, Hyatt, Radisson, Edenpark and TGI Fridays. Most recently, he served as Director and CEO, where he spearheaded operations and franchise development for Choice Hotels International across India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. At present, he leads the Franchise Business at Lemon Tree Hotels as CEO.

Sharing his plans to achieve the key strategic goals for Lemon Tree Hotels' Managed & Franchise Business over the next three-five years, Pawar says, "In keeping with our asset light growth strategy, we are expanding through both the management and franchise routes. At present, we have over 10,000 rooms across more than 110 hotels, of which 4,500-plus rooms are asset light. The goal is to grow the network to over 20,000 hotel rooms in the next five years, of which over 14,000 rooms will be managed or franchised. The aim is to have hotels not just in Tier I cities but also in Tier II, III and IV cities. So, there are hotels coming up in places like Chandausi, Banswara, Tezpur, Sri Ganganagar and more.

KEY ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL FRANCHISE MODEL

Lemon Tree Hotels is strategically expanding its franchise model under the Keys by Lemon Tree Hotels brands, which include Keys Prima, Keys Select and Keys Lite. While exploring

management opportunities for all seven brands, the Keys portfolio allows for greater flexibility in onboarding hotels that meet brand standards but may not fit the design definitions of Aurika, Lemon Tree or Red Fox.

"Every step of the process – evaluation, signing, launch and operations – includes rigorous monitoring to ensure adherence to our brand service and quality standards," says Pawar. This commitment guarantees that guest experiences consistently meet expectations. Regular audits and corrective plans are implemented at all hotels, reinforcing the promise of quality across the Keys brands. "Delivering exceptional service is at the heart of what we do," he emphasises.

CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE INDUSTRY

The hospitality industry is, at present, experiencing a positive phase, but it faces significant challenges, particularly in manpower. Attracting fresh talent and retaining skilled staff remain critical issues. To address these challenges, Lemon Tree Hotels has implemented a range of comprehensive training initiatives, apprenticeship programmes and leadership development opportunities. "These efforts are designed to cultivate a skilled workforce capable of meeting evolving guest expectations and the demands of the industry. "Investing in our people is essential for sustaining our growth. By nurturing talent, we ensure exceptional

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appreciate our efforts in these areas. We are proud of our open-hearted, inclusive culture and environmentally sensitive ethos, which reflect our core values and commitment to making a positive impact,” says Pawar.

Revenue management, he says, requires a careful balance between maximising average daily rates (ADRs) and occupancy levels to find the optimal sweet spot. Lemon Tree Hotels is currently engaged in a comprehensive digital transformation initiative aimed at enhancing sales and optimising revenue management. “This includes developing technological solutions to increase operational efficiencies and streamline supply chain management. Additionally, the company is revamping its website and loyalty programme to further enhance guest engagement and drive revenue growth,” he shares.

service for our guests,” says Pawar, highlighting the company’s commitment to workforce development

On potential franchise partners and way ahead, Pawar shares the foremost thing that they look for in a partner is a meeting of minds. “Setting the expectations from both sides – the owner’s with regards to the brand and the brand’s in the context of the owner are important. If these match, we are looking at a successful and long-lasting partnership,” he says.

STANDING OUT IN A COMPETITIVE LANDSCAPE

Since its inception, Lemon Tree Hotels has epitomised exceptional value, quality and memorable experiences. The brand is committed to delivering differentiated service offerings that resonate with guests and loyalty members alike, ensuring a compelling value proposition. Additionally, Lemon Tree Hotels places a strong emphasis on environmental, social and governance (ESG) initiatives, focussing on environmental stewardship and fostering diversity, equity and inclusion. “Our guests and owner partners

BUILDING A MOTIVATED TEAM

Building and maintaining a cohesive team can be challenging, but promoting cultural sensitivity and inclusive leadership is essential. “Creating an environment where every employee feels valued and respected is key to our success. This approach fosters a culture where everyone recognises the critical role they play in the organisation,” says Pawar, adding, “Patience and empathy are vital when collaborating across departments.” Encouraging open and transparent communication helps create a collaborative atmosphere where team members can express themselves freely and work together towards shared goals.

Lemon Tree Hotels is poised for expansion in cities with high potential. The company is actively engaged in discussions with various owners and partners across key metros as well as Tier I, II and III cities in India, and prominent international destinations. The focus is on growth in locations that align with the travel patterns of our target customers. ■